

# Staying MENA-focused, Es'hailSat eyes new opportunities in APAC

Ali Al Kuwari, president and CEO of Es'hailSat, shares with **APB** how the company has progressed since its establishment in 2010, and why satellite remains a key communications platform despite the emergence of OTT services.

**E**stablished in 2010, Es'hailSat has been primarily focusing on the Middle East and North African (MENA) region. What are the key services that Es'hailSat has been providing to the broadcast sector in the region, and what opportunities do you see in the wider Asia-Pacific region?

**Ali Al Kuwari:** Direct-to-home (DTH) is the key service we provide on our Ku-band capacity, both in the pay-TV and free-to-air (FTA) segments. beIN Sports, being our anchor customer in the pay-TV segment, is taking a large number of transponders on a long-term lease. Al Jazeera, Al Rayyan, Qatar TV and a host of other niche regional channels take up multiple Ku-band transponders for FTA DTH services.

We also provide playout services, compression, modulation and uplink services, along with capacity lease. The services include content transfer via online or fibre between playout facility, and uplink station for final distribution via satellite.

Our region of coverage is MENA, with services being offered via Es'hail-1 in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), North Africa and Levant. The coverage area remains the same with the soon to be launched Es'hail-2, which will bring additional capacity to support exciting and new customers looking to grow their business within the region.

However, our goal has always been

to be a global player in the satellite space; hence, we see ourselves being active in South-east Asia, and other regions in the near future, by offering broadcast and telecommunications services. We are in active discussions with partners within the region, and we hope to conclude these partnerships, and launch our services over the next few years.

**The broadcast industry saw the emergence of over-the-top (OTT) platforms, which have resulted in the shift in consumers' viewing habits towards non-linear viewing. In your opinion, how has this change in consumer behaviour impacted both the broadcast and satellite industries, and what other technology trends is Es'hailSat looking at in 2018?**

**Ali Al Kuwari:** Non-linear viewing via OTT platforms is increasing around the globe. However, we see it as being complimentary to the existing linear channels on satellite, and do not believe the linear viewing habits of consumers will completely disappear due to the emergence of these OTT services. Satellite will remain as the primary platform for distribution of TV channels, especially news and sports channels, where viewership numbers, rather than reducing, are continually increasing globally. However, broadcasters will need to adapt with multi-platform and multi-device applications to cater for new consumer behaviour, where seamless transition for consumers, from one device at home to mobile devices while on the move, becomes a major differentiator. In this regard, satellite operators have started



Positioned at the 25.5°East location in geostationary orbit, the Es'hail-1 satellite is packed with Ku- and Ka-band capacities, providing services to the broadcast, telecommunications and broadband sectors.

working independently and together with broadcasters to provide these services.

4K/Ultra HD (UHD) channels will be another differentiator for the satellite operators, where bandwidth, quality and reliability become priorities for broadcasters and consumers. Satellite has a definite advantage over other platforms for distribution of these services. Technology and equipment to efficiently support these services for consumers are areas we will be focusing on in 2018 and beyond.

**Es'hailSat has collaborated with Inmarsat to expand L-band services in Qatar. Can you share with us what role does Es'hailSat play in this partnership, and what opportunities does L-band have to offer to the broadcast sector, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region?**

**Ali Al Kuwari:** The collaboration between Es'hailSat and Inmarsat is a strategic partnership for both companies to expand our product portfolios, and enter new markets. The partnership enables Es'hailSat to provide voice and data services using L-band in Qatar and surrounding areas, and add to the existing products and services in Ku- and Ka-bands currently

on Es'hail-1. For Inmarsat, Qatar is a new market, one which has low L-band voice and data penetration, especially in mobility services.

The L-band service offers quick deployment of connectivity for news crew and first responders in locations around the globe, especially in locations where cellular connectivity is poor, or where having standard ground equipment for satellite communications is not feasible. Lightweight and easy to set up, the L-band terminals enable even a one-man crew to be on site, and be transmitting live within a short period.

**In Asia-Pacific where C-band is the dominant frequency, how do you see high-throughput (HTS) developing, and what are the drivers to encourage a widespread adoption of HTS in this region?**

**Ali Al Kuwari:** C-band has been popular for video distribution and cellular backhaul across a wide region; this is especially true for high rainfall regions. However, with demand for services beginning to become very focused- and area-specific, HTS with smaller cell coverage compared to C-band becomes a viable option. HTS can be feasible in Ku- or Ka-band, depending on the region of coverage.

We see the demand for HTS capacity coming from consumer broadband, cellular backhaul, enterprise, government and mobility sectors. Some of the key factors for higher rate of adoption will be optimum coverage, high throughputs per beam, lower cost per Mbps, lower cost of terminals, traffic shaping and latency, among others. As we have seen over the past few years, the take-up of HTS capacity has increased as cost of ownership and price per Mbps comes down. We certainly believe the sectors mentioned above will adopt HTS services quicker over the coming years. **APB**

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